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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR X0XX
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Gaza Operation

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that yesterday Israel stepped up the pressure on Hamas and dropped a one-ton bomb on the home of one of the group's top five leaders, Sheikh Nizar Rayyan, killing him and a reported 18 others including his family. The IDF made final preparations for a ground operation expected in the coming days. However, The

Jerusalem Post quoted some security sources as saying that the likelihood of a massive IDF ground incursion into Gaza was receding. Israel Radio quoted Ismail Radwan, an official of Hamas's military branch, as saying that Qall Zionists interestsQ were now in danger.

All media reported that yesterday an Ashdod a high-rise building took a direct hit from a Hamas rocket.

Major media reported that yesterday in Paris FM Tzipi Livni rejected calls for a 48-hour "humanitarian pause" and told her French counterpart, Bernard Kouchner, that Hamas must not be given the opportunity to gain any sort of legitimacy within a renewed truce.

The Jerusalem Post today (and Maariv yesterday) reported that the diplomatic bid for a truce will intensify next week.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday Fatah operatives in the West Bank criticized the PA leadership and accused its representatives of failing to take a Qtough stanceQ against the current IDF operation.

The media reported that yesterday 51 rockets landed in communities surrounding Gaza. Hamas quoted the IDF as saying this week in an interim report of the current situation that the threat that Hamas's ballistic capabilities pose to the people of the Negev is less serious than initially presumed and that the residents of the targeted areas are not demonstrating signs of panic. Still, the newspaper quoted Deputy DM Matan Vilnai as saying that should the IDF mount a ground invasion into the Strip, Hamas is expected to pick up the pace and take more risks in launching rockets.

Israel Radio quoted the Arabic-language newspaper Assennara as saying that Israel warned Syria not to let Hizbullah attack Israel. The radio reported that Egypt has requested that the Israeli military not attack mosques, even if they conceal weapons. On Wednesday night the IAF destroyed the Hawa Mosque in southern Gaza.

All media reported that DM Ehud Barak and FM Tzipi Livni are engaged in an unprecedented war of words, slander and struggle for credit.

Leading media reported that at the urging of the High Court of Justice. Israel agreed yesterday to allow eight foreign journalists into Gaza when it reopens the border. The Tel Aviv-based Foreign Press Association had petitioned to let up to 12 foreign journalists into Gaza.

The media reported that yesterday two Israelis were shot and wounded in a shopping mall in Odense, Denmark.

Maariv presented the results of a TNS/Teleseker poll on voting intentions for the Knesset elections:

In brackets: Maariv's December 25 poll):

Kadima:28 (30); Likud 28 (29); Labor Party: 16 (11); Yisrael Beiteinu: 12 (13); Shas: 11 (10); Arab parties: 10 (10); Meretz: 6 (7); United Torah Judaism: 5 (5); National-Religious Party-Jewish Home 4 (3); Hadash: 4 (4); United Arab List-Arab Movement for Renewal: 4 (4).

Today, in light of the fighting against Hamas and the performance of the political echelon, has your attitude toward any of the following people changed for the better, for the worse, or has remained unchanged?

Ehud Barak :For the better: 43.9%; for the worse: 2.5%; unchanged: 48%

Tzipi Livni: For the better: 27.9%; for the worse: 3.1%; unchanged: 63.5%

Ehud Olmert: For the better: 24.4%; for the worse: 7.1%; unchanged: 63.5%

Benjamin Netanyahu: For the better: 23.0%; for the worse: 3.5%; unchanged: 68.4%

The Jerusalem Post cited the results of a poll taken by Smith Research this week: Since the previous poll published on October 31, Likud rose from 27 seats to 29; Labor went up from 14 to 15; and Kadima fell from 27 to 23. The Right bloc's advantage over the Left remains a hefty eight mandates, 64 to 56.

On Wednesday Channel 2-TV cited a poll conducted by Geocartographia that showed that 90 percent of the Israeli public supports the Gaza operation.

Gaza Operation:

Summary:

Columnist and former Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Sarid wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QI hate all the terrorists in the world, whatever the purpose of their struggle. However, I support every active civil revolt against any occupation, and Israel too is among the despicable occupiers.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (1/2): QSix days into Israel's confrontation with Hamas, just one world leader has steadfastly shown genuine understanding of our dilemma -- George W. Bush.... We are reasonably confident that the incoming administration will cut Hamas no more slack than the outgoing one.

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QNobody expects Hamas to wave white flags.... But they are not reading Israel correctly.

Conservative Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QThe conflict isnQt between Hamas (with its rockets) and Israel. It is between Hamas as one of the constitutive elements of radical Islam and the free world,

Political and parties columnist Sima Kadmon wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot: QIf something can already be summed up at this stage of the operation, it is that is not recommended to hold wars during election campaigns.

Columnist Adi Mintz wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: QPalestinian national aspirations wonQt be able to come into fruition in the western Land of Israel [Israel and the territories].
Block Quotes:

II. "A Thank You to Bush"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (1/2): QSix days into Israel's confrontation with Hamas, just one world leader has steadfastly shown genuine understanding of our dilemma -- George W. Bush.... The Arab League version Qstrongly condemns all military attacks and the excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by Israel...Q It makes no mention of Hamas's aggression. At some point, Rice will meld her own proposals with those of French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan (who ostentatiously boycotted Israel on his fact-finding tour of the region), and the proposals of a bitterly divided Arab world, along with Israel's thoughts, to produce a workable cease-fire proposal. As this scenario plays out, we hope Hamas's military capacity will, meanwhile, become considerably eroded.... We are reasonably confident that the incoming administration will cut Hamas no more slack than the outgoing one.

II. "If You (or I) Were Palestinian"

Columnist and former Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Sarid wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (1/2): QI hate all the terrorists in the world, whatever the purpose of their struggle. However, I support every active civil revolt against any occupation, and Israel too is among the despicable occupiers.... But, and pay attention to this but, if a normative young person has a spontaneous answer that is different from mine, and that answer also escaped the mouth of an Israeli lieutenant general [as Ehud Barak said about 10 years ago], then every individual must see himself as though his son is running with the wrong crowd. If things were the other way around, our son-whom-we-loved would be a damned terrorist, almost certainly, because he is of the third and fourth generation of refugee condition and oppression, and whence cometh salvation? He has

nothing to lose but his chains. Whereas we, his mother and father, would be weeping for the departing son because he will never return to see the land of his birth and us, except in his photograph on the wall as a shahid, a martyr.... There are no good and bad peoples; there are only leaderships that behave responsibly or insanely. And now we are fighting those whom a goodly number of us would be like, had we been in their place for 41 and a half years.

III. "The Price of the Operation"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (1/2): QThe name of the game is counting the bodies and the destruction. There is no intention to conquer territory. Taking control of the launching areas is important, but only as a secondary goal. The idea is the Qphysical erosionQ of HamasQs fighting force. HamasQs real assets are not the rockets, and Gaza is not Lebanon. Hizbullah could enjoy ongoing supplies of missiles from Syria in the course of the entire Second Lebanon War. Gaza cannot refill its warehouses.... The hardest scenario, which Hamas will try to drag us into, is wallowing in the Gaza mud for an extended period of time. This would mean expanding the ground operation to another interim stage after which the last stage in the series of scenarios could take place: taking over all of the Gaza Strip. There will be no surrender. Nobody expects Hamas to wave white flags.... But they are not reading Israel correctly. They donQt believe that it will dare embark on a ground operation. And that is their second major mistake. The first was not believing that it would dare act before the elections.

At most, they thought, there would be a reprisal operation, something limited from the air. The aerial reprisal operation was harsh, long and more extensive than they thought, and it has been exhausted. In the first few days the Air Force destroyed 100 targets in 20 minutes. By the end of the week it spends two hours in the air to destroy isolated targets, of gradually diminishing value. Collecting targets is becoming harder. This could also be an exit point -- a war that ends as a reprisal operation. However, nobody has provided the appropriate ladder to this end. BarakQs attempt to get a unilateral 48-hour lull to examine the dynamics got lost in the knotty and rocky relations of IsraelQs political leadership.

IV. "First Gaza, then the World"

Conservative Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/2): QThe conflict isnQt between Hamas (with its rockets) and Israel. It is between Hamas as one of the constitutive elements of radical Islam and the free world.... The declared goal is the establishment of a global Caliphate as part of an anti-Semitic ideology that also calls for the annihilation of the Jews.... Since political Islam has already annihilated millions without any declaration, it must be taken seriously when it proclaims extermination.

1V. QFighting in the Political Domain

Political and parties columnist Sima Kadmon wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot (1/2): QIf something can already be summed up at this stage of the operation, it is that is not recommended to hold wars during election campaigns. If we had thought that this business is too serious for political and personal interests to make it into the fray, if we had hoped that something had changed -Q we were wrong once again. Politics is bubbling on the ground like smoldering lava. It is difficult to manage such a delicate operation when such mistrust and mutual suspicions are troubling the political scene. LetQs not err: The operation might shuffle all the cards; the candidates know this well. Ask Barak. All polls conducted this week have shown a rise in the number of the Labor PartyQs Knesset seats -Q to say nothing about the Defense MinisterQs status.

VI. QA Diplomatic Window of Opportunity

Columnist Adi Mintz wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (12/31): QThe question is what will happen on the day after [the Gaza operation].... The Right must present a diplomatic alternative that would be good for Israel and focus on the cancelation of Palestinian security rule -Q both in Gaza and Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank]. In a nutshell, there is an answer to the demographic problem and the fears that Israel will have to manage the lives of over one million Palestinians in Gaza.

(The IDF comes and goes in Judea and Samaria; it doesnQt manage the lives of Palestinians there.) The main message to be conveyed is that Palestinian national aspirations wonQt be able to come into fruition in the western Land of Israel [Israel and the territories] -Q neither in the Galilee, nor in Judea and Samaria, nor in Gaza.

CUNNINGHAM